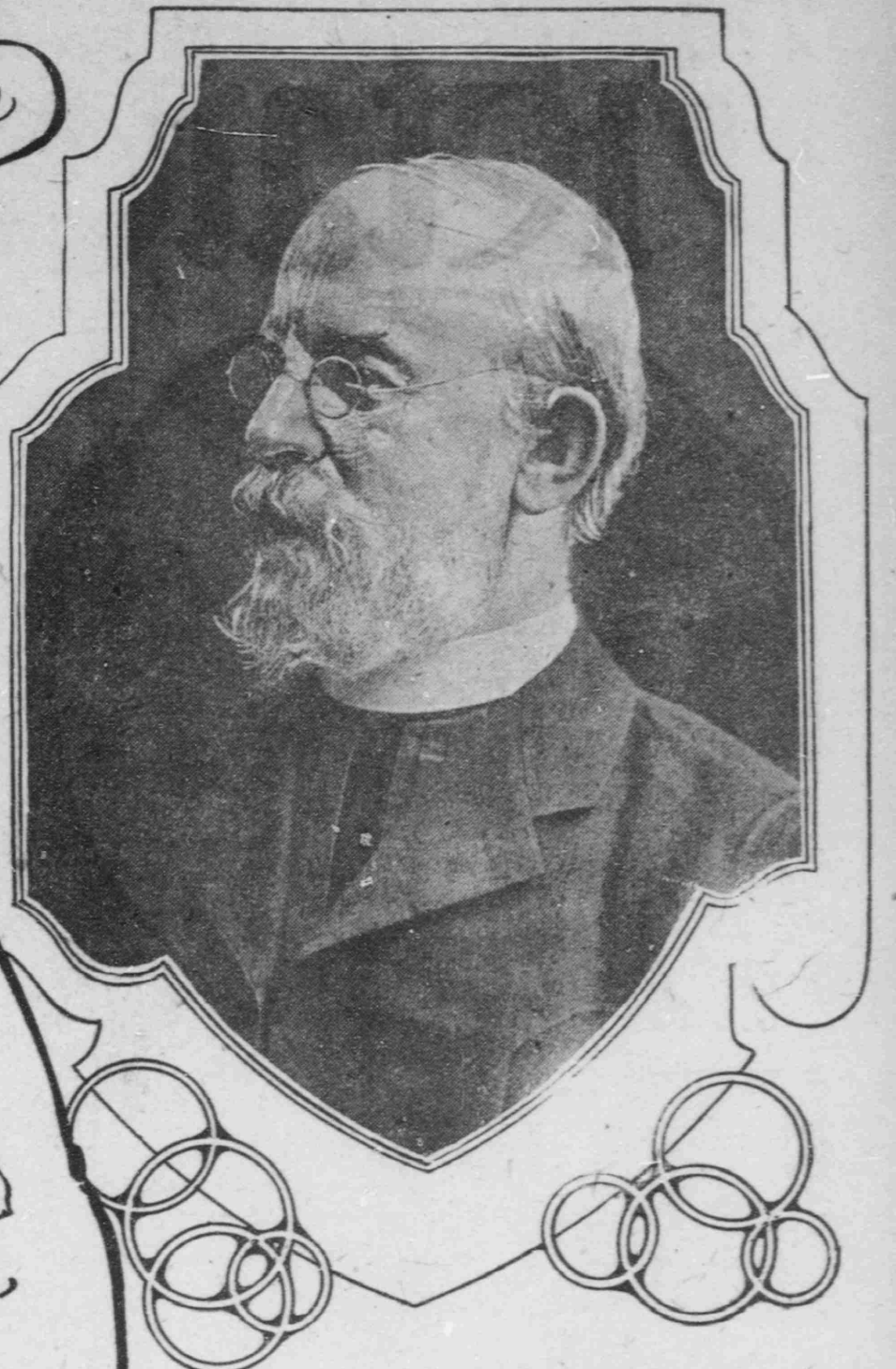


# Can a Camera Catch a Ghost?



DR. GEORGE M. SEARLE,  
Noted Washington Scientist, Who Says  
Camera May Prove Ghost Belief

Men of Science  
Now Believe  
That Shades  
of Departed  
Visit Earth  
and Declare  
Camera Will  
Prove It.

**D**O you believe in ghosts? If you answer "Yes" you will be in good company—that of many men who have distinguished themselves in science—for no longer is this belief regarded as a sign of ignorance and gross superstition. Even if you deny that there are ghosts, the probabilities are that deep down in your heart, you have a wholesome suspicion that you are not so very sure about it.

This fast-growing coterie of scientific men, which includes the great French savant, Camille Flammarion, and many others equally prominent, is now graced by the addition of Dr. George M. Searle, C. S. P., of Washington, who in addition to being one of the country's greatest astronomers, is also of a commanding position in the religious world, being the superior general of the Catholic missionary order popularly called the Paulist Fathers. This interview with him on the subject of ghosts and the possibilities of photographing them, is of much value, as it comes from an authority in a two-fold guise, that of a strictly scientific man and that of a great religious leader.

## The Undiscovered Land.

Practically every ancient and medieval belief has been explained away by the revelations of science, but the mystery of the spirit world has completely baffled both its friends and its foes. It has never been solved, though many societies, made up of impartial conservative investigators, are investigating and authenticating every ghostly visitation reported to them. Many cases cannot be explained away.

On the homely axiom, that "Where there is much smoke there must be some fire," it would seem that the testimony of the thousands

of persons who, within the decade, have claimed that they sighted spirits, cannot be dismissed as mere hallucinations. It is hard to believe that every one of these persons has had delirium tremens, hallucinations, insanity, and the like, or was an out-and-out liar, though perhaps the greater proportion of them fall into one of these categories.

**D**R SEARLE is too great a student of human nature to depend for proof on the one pair of eyes alone, and the average ghost usually works on the theory, "two is company, three is a crowd." As the inventor of many photographic appliances, he puts his faith in the sensitized plate, and believes that the study of ghosts will progress only by obtaining snapshots of them.

## Catches Ghosts With the Camera.

"I am looking for the camera to prove the actual existence of ghosts," said Dr. Searle, who, in addition to his other honors, is the head of the astronomical department of the Catholic University of America. "If phantoms have an objective reality, the camera should afford the surest proof of this. Should a satisfactory result be obtained from a ghostly sitter, the theory that accounts for phantoms on the basis of telepathy would be negated."

"It is impossible to conceive that telepathy could affect a gelatine or colodion plate. If a phantasm should be photographed, the conclusion is inevitable that there must be something there to photograph."

## Dr. Searle's Career.

Though of old Mayflower stock, he was born in England during the temporary residence of his father there. At the death of his parents he was brought up in the Unitarian faith. He was graduated from Harvard in the class of 1887, having as his classmate former Secretary of the Navy John D. Long. The next year he went to Dudley Observatory, and at the age of nineteen discovered the asteroid, Pandora. About that time he returned to his early faith, the Episcopalian. In 1889 he became calculator in the United States Coast Survey, and three

years later took the position of assistant professor of mathematics in the Naval Academy, then at Newport.

At this time he was received into the Catholic Church, and after studying theology for nine years, was ordained a Paulist Father in 1891. He has invented and patented a naval range finder which is in use in the navy, and various photographic appliances.

## Ghost-Hunting Rules.

"The reason I place all my reliance upon the camera," continued Dr. Searle, "is that I know the eye can deceive and can be deceived. But even if several persons saw the same phantasm simultaneously, it would be a very insufficient proof. It would have to be shown that the ghost had the same appearance that a ghostly object or person would present from the several points of vision."

"For instance, it would be fatal to the theory of objective reality if two persons standing at different points would see the ghost full-face and in the same plane. In order to prove the actual existence of ghosts, therefore, you must have three witnesses, and their statements should tally as to the ghost's appearance from the different angles from which they viewed him. In plain words, each observer must see a different view, front, back or sides."

"These conditions are too exceptional, and ghosts entirely too unaccommodating, to permit them to be easily fulfilled. The same difficulty does not, to my mind, apply to obtaining a photograph, although I am not aware that this has ever been done. I do not credit, as authentic, the reputed ghost photographs of the spiritists. The process of 'faking' such pictures is too well known to receive any detailed mention. What is desired, by scientific observers is to have a spirit so obliging as to manifest itself to several

persons at the same time, and to have a camera available on the occasion."

## Characteristic Specters.

"Although the objective reality of ghosts may be considered as comparatively improbable, it is not a theory to be ridiculed by any means. In the light of credible evidence we cannot disprove it, and must admit that it is well worthy of serious investigation. The matter of ghosts has, through the labors of the Society for Psychical Research—numbering among its members some of the most eminent scientists—assumed serious importance. It is hard to see how a great deal of the evidence gathered can be refuted. Of course, it is always possible to say that the witnesses are either telling falsehood, or are laboring under mental hallucination, but in many cases, such deductions are not at all compatible with the facts."

"From modern, reliable evidence, then, we are forced to regard the sheeted specter, with chains and other uncomfortable attributes, as a chimerical, a tradition which is not supported by recent observations. The genuine ghost appears to wear ordinary clothes and behaves in a decorous manner. He is not usually at pains to proclaim himself a ghost, and he can 'look pleasant' (which characteristic should recommend him to photographers). Moreover, he can appear in the daytime."

"Seldom does the ghost heed the person who sees him, and this reminds me of a very marked feature in all reported manifestations, namely, that the interest of the specter seems to be more in places than in persons. The place need not be a house necessarily, though I believe the tradition of haunted houses to have a foundation in solid fact. Most ghosts, though not all, are connected with them."

"By looking through the records of the Society for Psychical Research you

will find a number of very interesting cases. One especially strikes me because the observer who reported it had the intelligence to endeavor to photograph the apparition, but in this she was, unfortunately, unsuccessful. The witness was the daughter of a family which moved into the haunted house."

"The apparition was described by her as 'that of a tall lady, dressed in black of a soft woolen material, judged from the slight sound in moving. The face

was hidden in a handkerchief held in the right hand. That is all I noticed then (that is, the first time she saw it) but on other occasions, when I was able to observe her more closely, I saw the upper part of the left side of the forehead and a little of the hair above. Her left hand was nearly hidden by the sleeve and a fold of the dress. As she held it down a portion of a widow's cuff was visible on both wrists, so that the whole impression was that of a lady in widow's weeds.' Others of the family who saw the phantasm were the sister of the writer, her little brother, and the housemaid. It was seen quite plainly in the daylight."

"It is to be noted in this case, as in numerous others, that the footsteps were heard. 'They were heard,' says the narrator, 'by several visitors, and by new servants who had taken the place of those who had left in ill, by about twenty people, many of them not having heard previously of the apparition.' The writer continues: 'I also attempted to touch her, but she always eluded me. It was not that there was nothing there to touch, but that she always seemed to be beyond me, and if followed into a corner, simply disappeared.' The latter statement effectually eliminates the possibility of a trick."

"It appears that ghosts are enabled, whether by instantaneous disintegration or otherwise, it is impossible to say, to pass through solid substances as though such substances were not there. There are a great number of

cases like this alluded to, reported with minute circumstance, by persons of known integrity. This sort of evidence must stand on incontrovertible merits."

## Diabolical Agencies.

Dr. Searle holds that so-called "spiritualistic" phenomena may be ascribed to occult agencies outside of the personality of the pretended apparition, and that the latter may not be the person represented by the "medium."

"In the case of the apparition of a brute animal," he said, "and there are some well-attested instances of such, a diabolical spiritual agency is the most likely explanation. I think, in this connection, that the instinctive fear which is common to the entire human race with regard to supernatural manifestations, has a very good foundation. In my belief, there is a danger in such apparitions, which there is good cause to dread. It is not advisable to expose ourselves to it rashly."

"Do you think bodily harm might be incurred in a haunted house?" was asked.

"If the reports about such places be true," answered the doctor, "one should not investigate merely through curiosity. There seems to be shown, in some of the cases reported, a malignant influence. There have been, and apparently are now, haunted places where injury, physical, mental, or both, may be incurred—indeed, where such has actually been incurred."

## Humor Kills French Duels

**I**T is said that the practice of dueling is on the decline in France, the country that has been peculiarly its home. Perhaps the sense of humor has had more to do with the decline of dueling in France than any diminution of the Gallic ideas of honor. At any rate, there has during the past hundred years been a tendency to poke fun at the whole system.

The most laughable duel ever "fought" in France was that which took place in November, 1878, at Plessis-Piquet, between MM. Gambetta and de Fourtou.

Some heated words had passed between the two distinguished gentlemen in the chamber of deputies, for which, according to their ideas of honor, nothing could atone except a duel. The men met, therefore, on the field, attended by their seconds and the surgeons.

A look over the field was enough to convince anyone present that there would be no occasion for the doctors' services. A thick November fog hung over the scene—so thick, indeed, that one could hardly see his hand before his face. The arrangements for the duel required that it should be fought at thirty-five paces.

Nor was the fog the only circumstance that tended to place the combatants out of sight of each other. On the way to the field M. de Fourtou is reported to have said:

"Monsieur Gambetta has but one eye, and I am short-sighted; so the game will be about even."

It was, of course, rendered still more "even" by the fog. Neither man could see the other, and the sole danger was to the seconds and the doctors.

Almost miraculously the two bullets that were exchanged missed the persons in attendance. Everybody's honor was satisfied, and the whole party went home. Gambetta said that the affair was as near to being a skirmish in the dark as anything he ever saw.

A certain notary, highly esteemed, helped, during the reign of Napoleon III, to throw some ridicule on "the code." Meeting Marshal Vaillant, a somewhat inflated soldier and functionary, in a public place, he achieved the distinction of offending that important personage in some way. On the same day he was called upon by a young man whom he did not know, who challenged him to fight a duel.

"I do not understand," observed the notary. "Are you the principal in this affair?"

"But how have I offended you?" "You have not, sir," returned the unknown, "offended me personally. I am the aide-de-camp of Marshal Vaillant."

"I see," remarked the notary, with a smile. "It is beneath the marshal's dignity to fight me. It is beneath mine to fight you. I will send one of my clerks to oblige you in this little matter."

Needless to say, this delegated duel never took place.

Not more than five years ago a journalist of Paris, who had by some criticism offended a well-known politician, received from the aggrieved the following communication:

"Sir: One does not send a challenge to a bandit of your species; one simply administers a cuff on the ears. Therefore, I hereby cuff your ears. Be grateful that I have not had recourse to weapons."

To which remarkable note the journalist sent this reply:

"My Dear Sir and Adversary: I thank you, according to your wish, for having sent me cuffs by mail, instead of slaughtering me with weapons. Cuffed by mail, I respond by dispatching you by mail—six bullets in the head. You are, therefore, killed by letter. Kindly consider yourself dead. With respectful salutations to your corps, I am, etc."